

Faith in Words

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The INQUIRER

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Spring in the Trenches, a painting by Paul Nash. Three British soldiers waiting in a trench. One stands leaning against the wall of the trench, another sits on a step resting one arm behind his head. The third stands up looking out over the broken landscape beyond.
© Imperial War Museum (ART 1154)

Inquiring Words

AUGUST 4th 1914: FIRST FRUITS

"Dawn was theirs,
And sunset, and the colours of the earth.
...All this is ended"

- Rupert Brooke (1887-1915), from '1914'

The first fruits of a war's bitter harvest are
the first to be cut down, the first to fall.

Their deaths will say that here is no game,
no glory. Just an old folly replayed.

Together, as comrades, they face a
new reality: not all will go home.

And another: not all who do go home
will go with minds and bodies whole.

None will be unchanged.

But for now they are companions, sharing bread
on an uncertain road whose ending they can't see.

And some never will.

— Cliff Reed

With thanks

The colour cover on this issue of *The Inquirer* was sponsored by the Dunham Road, Altrincham Unitarian Chapel, which is celebrating the congregation's 200th anniversary. See the chapel history on page 15. Following this double edition, *The Inquirer* will skip an issue, with the next one to appear on 30 August.

A Chalice of Concern

We light our chalice when we come together for worship.

We light our chalice to remind us that there are those in other places who regularly light their chalice, too: our sisters and brothers who share in our Unitarian tradition.

And we light our chalice to help us focus our minds and hearts.

Sometimes our minds and hearts may centre on a particular joy or concern, and this week we share in a concern.

[Name the concern]

And so as I light our chalice today, we will have a moment of silence for our own thoughts and prayers on this, our common concern.

— By the Rev June Pettitt, Minister of Underbank Chapel, Sheffield

Ordinary Time

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.
So says Psalm 118.

And that's actually a great thing to think to yourself in the morning when you wake up. This is the day! We will rejoice!

And it's easy enough to do just that when it's your birthday, and it's sunny, and you're only expecting good things in your world. It's really easy to wake up then and be glad in this day the Lord made just for you.

But what about when it's a really ordinary day? What about when it's overcast, or pouring with rain, or just too hot to think, and there's nothing to celebrate and the day will mostly consist of paying bills, and everyone's a bit grumpy with you and you're a bit grumpy with everyone else and everything's just a bit rubbish?

How are we supposed to rejoice and be glad in that day?

And right now – August – we're slap bang in the middle of what is liturgically known as Ordinary Time. It's not Advent or Christmas. It's not Lent or Easter. It's just ordinary time. Ordinary. Plain. Dull.

But the ordinary is really important. Ordinary time is about celebrating everything, not about celebrating nothing. These ordinary days are really important, and they're glorious in their own right. Whether you believe God gave them to us or not, whether you believe there's any intention in there being a today or not, you can't deny that today is happening. You can't deny that you woke up and saw today. That there was food for you, and clean water. That today, however ordinary it might be, is happening, and that you are witnessing it and taking part in it.

And there are people longing for the ordinary. For what we, in the pampered west, think of as an ordinary day. There are people, close to us here and on the other side of the world, who are not having an ordinary day. Who are having a terrifying and hungry and pain-filled day, and who would give a lot to be able to be slightly bored by the humdrumness of this one.

So let's not find this Ordinary Time to be too much of a boring nuisance. I think there's another interpretation of that verse from the Psalm. I don't think it's telling us "this day is glorious! This is another wonderful day which God has given us and therefore we will rejoice in it, because that is the easy and obvious response."

I think it's telling us something less like "wow! What a glorious day! Rejoice!" and more like "Okay, this is the day the Lord hath made. This one, this not particularly glorious one. This slightly difficult one. This very ordinary one. This is what God has chosen to give us as our today. So, we will rejoice and be glad in it. Because we might as well."

This is the day we've got. So let's just accept it as a gift, and rejoice, and be glad in it in all its ordinary glories.

By Kate McKenna, Unitarian ministry student

Prayer for the divine whole

Spirit of Life and Love

God of our hearts

As we seek connection with someone,
something beyond ourselves,

We remain humbled at the awesome
complexity of the universe,

The miracle of creation and the grace of
the ultimate spirit.

From the tiniest shoots of spring bulbs
breaking the surface of the soil

To the strongest forces of the elements
swirling around us,

We recognise that even though we may
have our woes and faults,

We are part of a greater, divine whole

And we give thanks that within this
loving community

We may find the care and support we
seek

The warmth and laughter that we may
share

And the call to seek truth in all we see
and do

May it every be so,

Amen

— By Kate Dean (formerly Buchanan),
Unitarian ministry student



The Angelus

Photo by Bern Altman

'Love not knowledge is the answer, feeling not logic is the process.'

Charles Davis, Theologian

They had climbed up to the old shrine – of which one wall only remained, built into the side of the Reformation chapel, perched high on the cliff above the bay. “Is it alright” asked the Young Man, “when the Angelus bell is rung, for me to pause and say a prayer asking for help of Mary the Star of the Sea?” Reason, a statuesque lady with well-cut hair and dainty feet, sighed. She regarded the Young Man with a trace of scorn mixed with the kind of sympathy that those who know themselves to be correct can afford to expend.

“No,” she said. “It is not reasonable to invoke the assistance of a Jewish mother of uncertain virtue and little education, who was simply the construct of a first-century radical Judaic legend.” “But,” persisted the Young Man, “the spirits of the seamen who linger about this place move me to prayer. I hear the creak of ropes as passing ships dip their top-sails in homage to the Lady and sailors petitioning for her special protection.”

“I cannot tell you what to believe,” said Reason, “but I can ask you to consider this. Your mind is deeply influenced by the superstitious perceptions of centuries of well-meaning but naive folk. Prisoners all of an ignorant society whose sole recourse was to a learning perpetrated and preserved by a priestly class bent upon maintaining its hold over a compliant laity.

Throw yourself into the study of the world around you. There are natural wonders here, enough for a lifetime of study, and a million more tragedies crying out for remedy than can be embraced within the competence of a single man or a single generation. Look to the salvation of this world and abandon the chimera of the next.”

“Maybe,” said the Young Man. He turned to the Old Person beside him, androgynously resplendent in a long coat of many colours, and battered Ugg boots. “Would you say a prayer to the Lady?” he asked. “No reason not to,” returned the Old Person. “And yet, my reason tells me that Reason is correct. There is so much suffering and sorrow in this world, crying out for reform and repair. But love is what I see with, and what I see touches first the heart. The reasoning mind must always be our guide for without it we cannot contrive the good that we would do, but it is the heart that strikes the spark which fires the boiler of compassion.

“Look,” he said pointing across the bay as a great shaft of light pierced the dense mist over the water, “does the Lady give us a sign? Or is that amazing light merely a meteorological phenomenon? A sudden off-shore breeze, a parting of the sea fret so that the young Spring sun for one glorious moment shines through?” He put out a hand and gently touched Reason’s cheek. “So long as we can in conscience each respect the other, does it matter which of us is correct?”

“Perhaps not,” answered Reason quietly, “I don’t suppose it does.” The Young Man put an arm around each of them. “Amen and thank God for that, my brother and my sister.”

– By Naomi Linnell, a member of the National Unitarian Fellowship.

There is a feeling that is the sound and smell of blackness. It's not necessarily evil, although it can be. To be fair it's rarely evil but feels it, oh how it feels it.

From the devastation of unrequited love or dysfunctional love, the neuroses of addiction, the desperation of war or famine or poverty or loss or imposed singularity of faith or opinion: all are the sound and smell of darkness. You cannot see as there is no light, you can only imagine.

Imagine that tunnel of light, even though you can't see the pinprick of light distant at the entrance. The only thing required is to be willing to look for the pinprick, no requirement to see it.

Always be willing to look. Always accept that despite that feeling that is the sound and smell of darkness there is a pinprick of light. Accept this.

Always be willing to look.

*— By Mark Hutchinson, member of Chorlton Unitarians
Photo by John Boyer*



Crystal, a camel of vision and heart

By John Harley

There's a region of Morocco where all camels are free. If you travel to the Vanilla Valley you will see hundreds of camels roaming, sleeping under the shade of trees, chewing on plants and shrubs, cooling themselves in streams – their casual, unmoved faces truly express their lifestyles. They have never experienced any captivity and they know no fear. They are superb at lounging around and resting in amongst huge slabs of purple marble. Experts will tell you this marble is very rare and fine and that the cracks and splinters suggest that they are the only surviving fragments of a huge ancient ruin.

If you visit this beautiful area you will find simple wooden carvings of camels sold in tourist stalls. You can pick them up quite cheaply. Look out for the golden coloured blanket on their backs made of tin. Let me tell you now these little models are not of any random camel. They have been crafted to remind us all of a very special camel who lived over seven centuries ago. Her name was Crystal and I'm going to tell you about her amazing and difficult life.

All those years ago this part of Morocco was ruled by a very nasty ruler – King Hassan. He treated camels terribly badly. None of them received enough water or food or were properly rested. He didn't treat humans much better either.

Now I've got a question for you. What do camels store in their humps? Some of you may say 'water'; while some of you smarter ones will say 'fat'. Well actually the answer is memories. Also have you noticed how big camels' eyes are? They are always looking and they take everything in. Their little fluffy, round ears are perfectly designed to swivel this way and that and so they hear everything. Crystal was a special camel. Her eyes were as clear and bright as diamonds and she loved to listen to the late-night conversations of men as they chatted around fires. She worked long hours and was weak, but the only thing that kept her spirit alive was to collect stories. Happy stories, sad stories, crazy stories, tender stories, love stories ... any story that she overheard. And where did she store them, I hear you ask. In her hump of course. Her hump was full of the most wonderful fables and myths from all over the land.

King Hassan, like many powerful people, was bored. He had so much power he didn't know what to do with his time, especially his long evenings. He got to hear about Crystal's extraordinary knowledge of stories and wanted her for his own amusement. She was brought to his palace by his servants and he told her that every evening she would tell stories late into the night. She was set to work immediately. From that day on, she told her stories. He was delighted because he could entertain important guests and show her off. Word got around that he owned the best storytelling camel in Africa. He rewarded her with a golden blanket so that she would feel special but



during all her years with King Hassan she never felt special. She was badly treated like all the other camels and would often weep at night. She had one friend – the King's young son Karim. Every night he would secretly bring her dates and bananas and this was the only thing that kept Crystal alive. Something King Hassan was too selfish to realise was that over the years Crystal's hump slowly lost its collection of stories because she had no enthusiasm or desire to collect new stories.

She became more and more tired and demoralised until one day King Hassan announced to his court that he would throw a huge

banquet to celebrate his birthday and he required Crystal to tell her best story to a whole host of important dignitaries from all over Africa. She tried to tell him that in fact she only had one story left to tell and that this story was a dangerous story and would not please the King at all. He chose to ignore her warning and accused her of being self-centred – only thinking of herself on his special day. Crystal dreaded this event and tried to escape several times.

After days of intense worry for Crystal the dreaded banquet arrived. Mountains of rich and exotic food appeared on every table. Crystal was hungry but so empty of joy that she had no appetite. Finally the moment arrived when the King's palace fell silent and the vast array of diplomats and ambassadors waited for Crystal to start.

Crystal began her story with much discomfort and pain.

'Many years ago when King Hassan was 21 he inherited the throne and at his coronation he announced that he wanted the biggest, most lavish palace built in the whole of Africa. He said it must be made of the finest purple marble and that all the camels of Vanilla Valley would carry the marble from the mines in the distant hills. He promised that when the palace was finished he would release the camels and that they would be free. After nine years of toil and suffering the palace was complete. So much of this strange dark purple marble had been used that even the brightest rays of sunshine would plunge into the stone and be lost. The camels were shocked when King Hassan appeared to have forgotten about his promise, for he kept them and their children in captivity for the rest of their lives to carry yet more stone to build walls to enclose his land and prisons and watch towers to keep his subjects in line'.

Suddenly there was an almighty crash in the banquet hall. King Hassan brought his fist down on a solid silver coffee table and it broke into two pieces. He was furious at Crystal's story and forbade her from continuing. Speechless with rage he ordered his guards to take Crystal to the Lost Valley without delay. The Lost Valley was a region of desert where all camels were sent to die. Bones poked precariously out of the sand and the wind smelt of death. Poor Crystal died after a few torturous weeks. At the exact moment she died, a mas-

(Continued on next page)

Theological commitments of Unitarianism

Are we only united in values, or can non-dogmatic Unitarians share a common theology? **Stephen Lingwood** says 'yes', and offers this thoughtful template.

I'm just back from spending a few days with ministry students and probationary ministers for an intense time of residential learning called 'Ministry in the Making'. One of the topics we discussed was whether Unitarianism had any theology beyond personal credos that we all share in common. Or whether it is only 'values' we share. I said I do believe that Unitarianism is a coherent theological tradition very definitely committed to a particular approach to the life of faith and to theology. I believe there is a theology that holds us.

Unitarianism is a theological tradition with commitments. This list could be improved, or put in different ways. But from years of studying and reading I really do believe we are committed to the following theological points:

1. **There is a spiritual dimension to reality** – though this should be understood as an existential claim rather than a metaphysical one. In other words, there is a deeper, fuller, better, more mysterious, more alive way to live – and this is what the religions have been wrestling with for thousands of years.

2. **Revelation is not sealed:** the fullest truth about the nature of our lives and of the universe has not once-and-forever been revealed and codified at any point in the past. Instead, we are part of our continuous process of seeking ever deeper, bigger and more complex understandings of this truth. We are part of a historical process of discovery.

3. **The spiritual reality is imminently and fully present in the here and now.** We do not look to the past for evidence of revelation or to the future for a time of fulfilment and completion. Neither should our attention be on the

Crystal's story

(Continued from previous page)

sive earthquake hit the land and the purple marble palace came crashing down. King Hassan was crushed by the very marble that he adored. Yet, miraculously, his son Karim survived.

Karim was determined to bring some goodness into the region. At his coronation he announced that all camels would be set free and he promised that for the rest of time those camels living in Vanilla Valley would never have to toil or suffer again. From that day on camels lived happily in the gaps between the giant blocks of marble.

If you go and visit the Vanilla Valley you may wish to buy a little souvenir of Crystal. But, I warn you, if you walk around the ruins of the palace remember that these camels still have crystal clear vision and amazing hearing. Anything you say may be stored in their humps and who knows what story you may crop up in sometime in the future? As you walk between the marble slabs you will smell exquisite scents of vanilla in the air or maybe the fragrance is of freedom itself.

The Rev John Harley is co-ordinator of youth activities for the Unitarian General Assembly. He also created the picture of Crystal.

afterlife or some other place. Our religion drives us deeper and deeper into this reality, rather than escaping from it.

4. Related to this is the affirmation that fundamentally **reality, the universe, life, is good**. There is pain and tragedy, but ultimately 'it was good' (Genesis 1) – it is good.

5. **The human being** (the human 'soul' if you like) **is a source and locus of spiritual reality**. We are intimately involved in this: 'The Highest dwells within us ... As there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so there is no bar or wall in the soul where we, the effect, cease, and God, the cause, begins' (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

6. **We are One** – we are deeply intertwined with one another in an 'interdependent web of all existence' (Unitarian Universalist principles) or an 'inescapable network of mutuality' (Martin Luther King). This may be point 5 (above) just described in a different way. The fundamental truth of our existence is that we are not separate but deeply connected with all that is.

7. **Human beings have sacred inherent worth and value**. For this sacredness not to be trampled, human beings must be free. Therefore relations between people should be based on free consent and not coercion.

8. Related to this is the realisation that **the human race is one**. We have more in common than what divides us. There is not one particular group of people who are superior. There is a foundational equality for all people.

9. **We live in a non-optimal world** where the oneness and equality of all is frustrated by various systems and forces. It is a moral obligation to seek to put this right and commit to justice. Or, to put it another way, **love and spirituality cannot be separated**. 'You cannot love God without loving your sister' (First Letter of John). Religion must lead us to a greater compassion, and any religion that does not increase our capacity for compassion is a false religion.

10. **Community is necessary**. We cannot live out these truths in isolation, but must enter into the discipline of community-making to live out this calling in the world.

11. **We are ultimately hopeful** about this universe. Not immediately, not unrealistically optimistically, 'not without dust and heat' (John Milton, frequently quoted by Unitarian James Luther Adams). But eventually there is a reason for hope. We are a hopeful people. 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well' (Julian of Norwich).

This theology allows and invites a diversity of languages and approaches by different people and communities. Most obviously it allows a variety of beliefs along a spectrum of religious naturalism-pantheism-panentheism-theism. By its very nature it does not set out complete theological answers in the form of creeds.

But it is theological. It is a coherent religious approach to life and the universe. It is significantly more than a set of political values. And it very definitely excludes some theological positions which are contrary to the Unitarian approach to faith. Theology is not just about personal preferences. It is a communal process of understanding more deeply the nature of our religious task. Unitarians have a very definite approach to theology. And we would be a lot better off if we considered it more deeply.

Stephen Lingwood is minister at Bank Street Chapel, Bolton.



Over the hills and far away

By Margaret Kirk

It's that time of the year again when I look at the hills around me with a kind of yearning. I want to be on the move, but my body is no longer in agreement. I notice the footpath signs leading across fields, up hillsides, by rivers and I think, how wonderful it is to live in a country where there are footpath signs encouraging me to leave the beaten track and explore.

Fortunately, most of my life, I've walked wherever I've wanted to. I've just taken it for granted that I could, so it was a great shock to me when I was on holiday in Scotland in the early 1980s – my three children were quite little – and we discovered that much of the moorland we could see around us was privately owned. To venture on to those moors was trespass. I was indignant. How could this possibly be?

Years later staying with friends outside the city of Indianapolis in America another shock when I discovered that I could not walk from their place into town – not only was it unheard of, it was impossible because there simply was no sidewalk, or as we say, no pavement.

Discoveries like that make me realise how grateful I am for what I've always taken for granted. And at this time of the year when car bound, I spot the footpath signs leading enticingly up hill and down dale and I get a little burst of delight.

This has me thinking too of past ministers for whom walking from one chapel to another was the only way they could conduct their ministry. Someone like Richard Wright, the late 18th-, early 19th-century Unitarian minister who walked for miles in Norfolk and Lincolnshire and later in Wales preaching in churches and chapels – sometimes at gatherings out in the open. The late Rev John McLachlan, a keen walker himself, wrote a book *Rara Avis*, celebrating the Rev Wright's missionary spirit.

But my ministry relies on four wheels and not even public transport will get me to where I need to be.

Once a month I make the journey across the North York moors to Scarborough to take their morning service and then follow the coast road to Whitby, take the afternoon service there and return over the moors again by a different route towards home in Thirsk. By the end of the day I've done a complete circuit of the North York Moors.

There are some great moments on that journey: moving

down to Helmsley from Sutton Bank, the landscape around the southern edges of the moors rolls out before me – often I see it through misty sunshine, and then, later, there's the delight of the coastline between Whitby and Scarborough. But most of all, I love the line of the Cleveland Hills as I drive back between Stokesley and Thirsk.

The Cleveland Hills are referred to as a ring of iron because so much ironstone mining has gone on in this area.

Most of my early life was spent in the garden of England – Kent; much of it pretty countryside with orchards and hop fields. But the north, with its dramatic landscape, always had a hold on my heart and my imagination – especially as I spent a month most summers as a teenager with my aunt and uncle who ran a green grocery and fish shop in a remote village called Luddenden on the edge of moorland in the Calder Valley and I would spend hours walking with their dog – alone and very happy to be alone.

Hills represent a challenge and an opportunity. Valleys are for nestling, home making, domesticity. Hills are for climbing, for reaching the summit of and surveying the scene on the other side. Valleys are for comfort, for nurturing, for streams and pastures, for settling.

Geoffrey Winthrop Young, the early 20th-century mountaineer has written:

*Only a hill; earth set a little higher
above the face of earth:
a larger view
of little fields and roads:
a little higher
to clouds and silence:
what is that to you?
Only a hill; but all of
life to me,
up there, between the
sunset and the sea.*

Hills can be gentle and





Photo by Constantin Jurcut

Strength, inspiration, hope

rolling but sometimes they look kinder than they are in reality. It can be tough getting to the top of a hill summit and all serious walkers will know the frustration of thinking they've got there and discovering that the actual summit was beyond their sight line.

I well remember being with a group of 6th-form students walking the easy route to the summit of Blencathra near Keswick in the Lake District and hearing a variety of colourful expletives when they discovered that what looked like the summit was a mere staging post in the climb to the top.

Hills have such significance for us – the Bible is full of stories and pronouncements that are centred around hills and mountains: Moses delivers his commandments from Mount Sinai. Jesus' famous words in Matthew are referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, though no one is entirely sure where that mount was and sometimes it's referred to as the Sermon on the Plain ... doesn't sound so good though!

One of the most moving and comforting of psalms begins with the line 'I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help'.

So hills and mountains symbolise strength, endurance, hope and inspiration. They provide us with a different view from the summit – quite literally we see things differently from the summit of a hill. A whole range of different perspectives opens up.

That line 'Over the hills and far away' is a line from a nursery rhyme about Tom who was a piper's son. In one version he steals a pig and runs away with it. The version I'm thinking of is different:

This is how it goes:

*Tom, he was a piper's son,
He learnt to play when he was young,
And all the tune that he could play
Was 'over the hills and far away';
Over the hills and a great way off,
The wind shall blow my top-knot off.*

Our memories are strange things – 'over the hills and far away' is a line that stays in my memory and comes to the forefront of my mind when I'm travelling. I know it's got a lot to do with the impulse to break free and discover something new.

I believe it's quite a common impulse: a desire to break away, to go wandering. It's a notion that reverberates with all kinds of longings: travel, escape, adventure, risk taking, freedom, turning our back on the tried and tested, beginning again, defiance – all those things are part of the impulse to run 'over the hills and far away'.

Nicky Jenkins, minister of our Chorlton Church, wrote a piece for *The Inquirer* last year which was a response to the filming of the novel *The Hobbit* by JRR Tolkien, then on general release.

Bilbo Baggins is the hobbit who loves the comfort and homeliness of his village but just cannot resist the challenge of setting off with the wizard Gandalf and his band of dwarves to help them reclaim their lost city from the dragon Smaug.

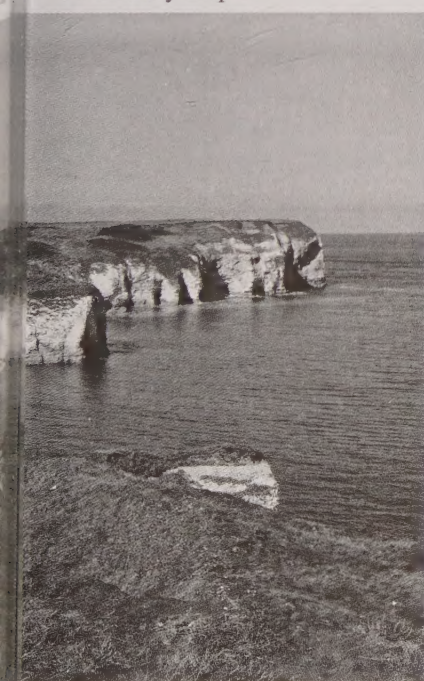
Nicky quotes Tolkien:

Then something woke up inside him and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves and wear a sword instead of a walking stick.

The zest for freedom and movement away from what we have become accustomed to is both a physical need and an emotional and spiritual one. And for us in particular, as Unitarians, it is part of our DNA.

We do not sit comfortably in one place. We may not be missionary preachers like Richard Wright, but our minds take us into a constant questioning – a constant re-assessing of what is of value. We are explorers. And that feels like the very best way to be on a summer's day in North Yorkshire or any other place for that matter.

*The Rev Margaret Kirk is a retired Unitarian minister.
Photo, left, of the Flamborough Cliffs by Michal Ufniak*



War is all the horrors, atrocities, crimes

By Feargus O'Connor

'Patriotism', Bernard Shaw once remarked, 'is your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it.'

It was mainly patriotism that caused millions of otherwise rational and well-meaning people, including Unitarians, to support a murderous and calamitous war which directly caused the deaths of over 8.5 million soldiers. War, according to the 19th-century Quaker Parliamentarian and peace campaigner John Bright, is 'the combination and concentration of all the horrors, atrocities, crimes and sufferings of which human nature on this globe is capable'. The root causes of war, according to William Ellery Channing, are our human propensity for evil and greed, the passion for superiority and power, false patriotism that puts our own nation above all others and an upbringing and education which serve to glamourise military exploits.

According to Channing, in comparison to war all other evils fade. We must learn to admire the heroes of conscience and human rights and the martyrs for peace and freedom rather than those political and military leaders who cause millions to die in wars and perpetuate the lasting enmity to which they lead.

'Let us teach that the honour of a nation consists', wrote Channing, 'not in the forced submission of other states but in equal laws and free institutions, in cultivated fields and prosperous cities; in the development of intellectual and moral power, in the diffusion of knowledge, in magnanimity and justice, in the virtues and blessings of peace.' Channing saw the remedies for as well as the causes of war to be of a moral and religious nature. He suggested that rulers should take more pride in the welfare of their people than in the exercise of political and military power. He praised the spirit of true philanthropy and caring for the wellbeing of our neighbours.

'We should honour nations for their free institutions, wise laws, promotion of humane education, benevolence and justice.' Religion, Channing taught, 'was given to bind together, refine, soften human hearts. Its great ministry is that of love.' One member of Channing's Boston congregation once complained:

'When Dr Channing used to preach about God and the soul, about holiness and sin, we liked him ... But now he is always insisting on some reform, talking about temperance or war. We wish he would preach the Gospel.' In the spirit of our Unitarian Universalist forebears William Ellery Channing, Clara Barton, Stanley Mellor and John Haynes Holmes and such inspiring Quaker moral exemplars as William Penn and John Bright, would it not be appropriate for us to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War on 4 August by active peacemaking and helping to save the lives of the victims of war today by supporting the Red Cross Iraq Crisis Appeal? Would this simple humanitarian act not show that Unitarians care for the lives and welfare of our global neighbours, in the spirit of the resolutions we have passed in support of the Charter for Compassion, our respect for the 'interdependent web of all existence' and the life saving work of the Red Cross?

To mark that centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, in the name of the Unitarian Peace Fellowship, our congregations of St Albans and Golders Green Unitarians are handing over cheques for £500 to the Iraq Crisis Appeal of the Red Cross. We hope other Unitarian individuals and congregations will do likewise. Donations can be sent to the British Red Cross, 44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL. Please mark for the attention of Laura Deacon and the Clara Barton Disasters Emergency Appeal. For more information see: <http://tinyurl.com/mo9zyhf>

The Rev Feargus O'Connor is minister with Golders Green and St Albans Unitarian congregations.



A corpse in the mud at 'Third Ypres',
September, 1917 © IWM (Q 11688)

Most Unitarians backed World War 1

By Alan Ruston

'The past is another country, they do things differently there' – this famous phrase by LP Hartley which opens his book *The Go-Between* accurately describes our connection with British Unitarians who faced the opening of the War on 4 August 1914. Their attitude towards it is – as far as we are concerned – another country.

Reading the columns of *The Inquirer* for August 1914 is salutary, and demonstrates how our view of the state – in particular – has been modified by what has happened since that fateful month. There was a clear shift in attitude by the end of September. Until that date there was a widely expressed admiration of Germany and in particular its remarkable contribution to Biblical scholarship over the previous century. The main figure to be admired then was Adolph von Harnack, a liberal theologian to whom Unitarians were very much attuned. By September 1914 he was under attack for his support for the German war effort.

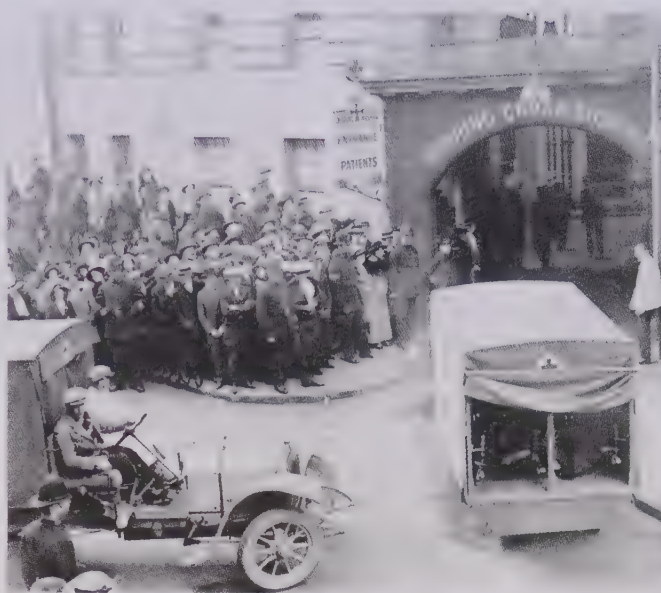
The *Inquirer* editor Rev WH Drummond nailed his colours to the mast in the issue of 8 August, immediately after Britain had declared war on Germany. 'We have always tried to work for peace but it was a capital blunder (the invasion of Belgium) on the part of the ruling dictatorship of Germany which suddenly reduced all the pleadings of the peacemakers to silence ... But there is one ray of hope about the situation, the war may be of short duration.' How wrong he was.

The view that seemingly was generally accepted was expressed by the Rev LP Jacks of Manchester College Oxford in the next issue. Already he was among the most influential writers in the Unitarian press; he became a well-known figure nationally over subsequent decades. The article was entitled *Our Duty to the State*, a theme he was to return to repeatedly. 'Under the circumstances one thought alone should dominate us – the thought of our Duty to the State [capital D and S]. All other duties, to God, to humanity and to ourselves are summed up in that. Let us concentrate our minds upon it and let no nightmare horrors weaken our service ... now that war has come, let us economise our emotion, and indulge in neither speech or feeling, save so far it strengthens us for suffering and action.'

There were no protests in response, to what was a new idea amongst Unitarians. It did not sit easily with the traditional view of the right of private judgement in all things including to the state. The only significant caveat expressed was that Unitarians should not detest the German people and their thought, only their leadership, which it was judged, had created the war. For example Unitarians from Austro-Hungary, with whom we

Quakers present 'White Feather Diaries'

The Quakers' online project serialising the diaries of five young people who opposed World War I goes live on 4 August. *The white feather diaries* are stories of some whose bravery saved lives and changed British legislation leading to a wider recognition of the legitimacy of the right to refuse to kill. The diaries offer an insight into overlooked aspects of war: resistance to killing and the relief of suffering. White feathers were handed to those who refused to enlist, as a sign of cowardice. The project can be followed on Facebook at www.facebook.com/wfdiaries and Twitter @wfdiaries and from 4 August on www.whitefeatherdiaries.org.uk.



Crowds greeted wounded servicemen arriving in ambulances at the Charing Cross Hospital on Agar Street, London, in September 1914. Support for the war was nearly universal – including among Unitarians – at that stage of the conflict. Photo © Imperial War Museum (Q 53275)

were at war, who were stranded in Britain, were to be helped by the creation of a distress fund. Pacifism, if it existed, did not find a place in the columns of *The Inquirer* and any differing views about the War did not surface until 1915 when its real impact was starting to be felt.

Unitarians were not alone among Nonconformists in taking this standpoint; the support for the War was very strong when it was recognised that peace was no longer possible. The Presidents of the national Unitarian associations wrote a message published in the 22 August issue, which included the sentence 'No words are needed to urge each and all to do what in them lies to serve their country in the present crisis.' In the same issue, the Rev J Estlin Carpenter, a widely admired Unitarian elder-statesman wrote 'We ourselves have hushed our party strife, and none is for a faction, but all are for the state'

As the War went on its dreadful course, attitudes towards it of course changed. People became numbed by its effects and it became all encompassing. There is almost desperation in the statement made in October 1916 by the Council of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association: 'The War overshadows everyone and everything; and churches and religious societies find themselves faced by problems of life and death for which there is no ready made solution.' Conscientious objectors came into focus after the arrival of conscription in July 1916 and the creation of the Unitarian Peace Fellowship was some way down the line. August 1914 was the start of the all-pervading War that changed everything in ways not then remotely envisaged. This is the story that comes out over the four years to 1918 during which upwards of 10,000 British Unitarians served in the Forces and of which about 1000 were killed. There will be other centenaries over which to ponder like the Battles of the Somme and of Passchendaele when they arise in the coming years.

Alan Ruston is a Unitarian historian and a member of the Watford Fellowship.

David Usher leaves London for US

The Rev David Usher, London District Minister for the Unitarian General Assembly leaves this month to live in California and to serve a Unitarian Universalist congregation there. In his time in the UK, David has been involved at many levels of British Unitarianism. He answered some questions about the state of the movement.

You are leaving your post as London District minister; can you tell us how you came to the decision and what your plans are?

I am leaving this ministry with real regret, as I have greatly enjoyed the past seven years and have been very gratified by some of the things which have been accomplished. Most notably, the Festival of Unitarians in the South East (FUSE) is now well established, and SimpleGifts is doing wonderful social action work in the East End of London, thanks to paid staff Rob Gregson and Ann Howell as well as a cadre of volunteers. I am moving to the States for two reasons. The first is to qualify for US Social Security: I need to work for at least another year to do so, and that will greatly enhance my income in retirement. The second reason is because I am in a relationship with a colleague in San Francisco and want to be nearer her. My cancer scare last year brought into focus that if I want to do something I should do it now. I will be doing a two-year Interim Ministry with the UU Community of the Mountains in Grass Valley, a small town in northern California.

How long have you been a part of the Unitarian General Assembly and which posts have you held?

I am a lifelong Unitarian, raised in the Adelaide congregation. I arrived in England in 1976 and began my ministry studies in Oxford the following year. During the '80s, before I moved to the States for the first time, I was very involved denominationally. I served on the then GA Council, was Chair of the Youth Committee, and Chair of The Development Commission, as well as several other posts.

In 1987 I proposed the formation of an international Unitarian organisation which then became The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, of which I was the founding President from 1995-99.

Since my return to the UK in 2000, I was the leading advocate for change in the national governance structure and served on the Task Force that developed the changes eventually adopted. I served on the Executive Committee, 2009-13.

Years ago, you were one of the group of people who began to look at the movement's governance and plan for its future. What did you hope for at the time?

The old structure made it impossible for anyone to show leadership at a national level. We had management, but not leadership. Collectively British Unitarians are pathologically allergic to leadership because they mistakenly think it somehow compromises their intellectual independence, but leadership is simply what makes things happen. I wanted us to be able to



David Usher

articulate a collective vision of who we are and how we could accomplish our shared ambitions.

Having been a member of the Executive Committee and seen it from both the inside and the outside, are you happy with what emerged as the new leadership structure?

When on the Governance Task Force I argued for some things not eventually adopted and personally think the present structure, though a vast improvement, still focuses too much on management rather than leadership. I would give much greater authority to the Chief Officer. The role of the Executive Committee should be to act as Trustees, guaranteeing financial and legal probity. Leadership can never be effectively driven by a volunteer committee meeting only a few times a

year. The London District has recognised this and has adopted its own new governance structure which is infinitely more effective and efficient.

What are your fears for Unitarianism's future in Britain?

That it won't have a future. That sentimental attachment to the past, and a selfish comfort with the present, will prevent Unitarians from accepting the fundamental truth that we exist not for the benefit of ourselves alone but for the world. It is not about what we who are already Unitarians want, but what the world needs. We have to adapt to the world as it is, not expect the world to adapt to what we were.

What makes you optimistic about Unitarianism in Britain?

Unitarianism has been an integrally rich part of my life since birth. I cannot imagine who I would be without it, or being anything else. When we are at our best, it is the best religious news on the block. All we have to do is be our best rather than settle for what is less demanding. If we do that, I am optimistic our future is assured. There are congregations in the UK which are doing that, and they are showing what is possible. Decline is not an externally imposed inevitability.

Aside from family and friends, what do you think you will miss the most about Britain?

Cricket. Decent beer. Lush green pastures. The delight and challenge of being in a country enriched by its international context (UKIP supporters, please note!). A political system which, though far from perfect, at least I understand. A health care system to be proud of, and for which I have personal cause to be enormously grateful. The absence of guns.

What is the one thing you wished all Unitarians could know?

That being a Unitarian should make real demands on you. It should make a difference to your life. It is not just about a casual narcissistic nurturing of one's own spirituality. If the world is not a better place because you are a Unitarian, it means very little and as a denomination we deserve to drift off into terminal obscurity.

'Church' is a lot more than just a building

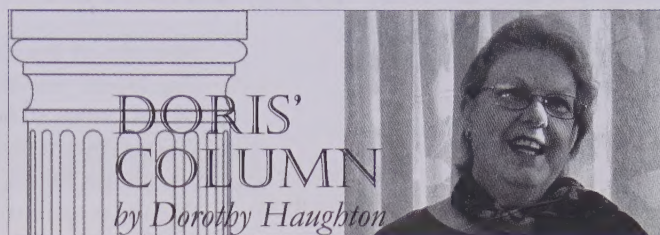
Church should be a verb, not a noun.

But it is a noun and not just any noun, a large structure that requires more attention than a prize-winning peke and gives very little in return. Oh, I know we have some beautiful buildings but we have a lot more unbeautiful ones. They are often too big, and stand as a constant reproach to the 12 of us huddled into a space designed for 500. And they eat up money. And, often they look dingy and neglected because keeping the roof from leaking costs all the money that needs to be spent on a paint job – and new carpets, and new curtains, and a better toilet, and a better kitchen, and a ...

And many of them have no parking and many have no open space unless you count a graveyard overgrown with brambles. If only you could afford to have the gravestones removed to the perimeter and create an easily mowable space that would be great for garden parties and children's games. But no, you need to pay the electricity bill and the plumber's bill and the insurance and ...

Have you talked (yes, yes, I know but I really really mean this) have you talked about your building? Not in a 'how do we keep it standing' sort of way but in a 'looking into the future' 'sort of way. Is your building currently 'fit for purpose' and will it continue to be so into the future? Do you know where all the relevant paper work is? Have you sorted out what will happen to the building if the congregation dies out?

Think about this – if there are only six of you and none of you is under 70, when the penultimate member dies, don't look to the GA to save you. It will be too late. If there are only six of you and ... why are you spending out all that money on keeping your church open? Why are you worshipping in that outdated building that sucks up money? Why can't you make a tiny bit more effort and join up with another congregation? And don't give me all that guff about having been christened and married there. You do not have an inalienable right to be buried at the church in which you have 'always' worshipped. And if there



isn't another congregation nearby there are congregations that manage in other premises. I know, I know – if we get rid of the church, we shall never get it back. Do you really want it back? It eats money, it is uni-purpose, it has an unwelcoming aspect and it is a CHURCH – a place no one goes to anymore.

Are you absolutely sure that you want a church? What I really want is a two-storey building which is a library/health centre/pharmacy downstairs and the upstairs – served, of course, by lovely lifts as well as a staircase – is a community hall and a couple of decent-sized meeting rooms, a kitchen and all the usual offices. I want parking and a play area. I want a little garden. I'd like at least a couple of trees. I could really go for a swing, big enough for adults. What do you really want? Have you got it? Could you get it?

The reason I am so unusually concentrating on bricks and mortar is that I seem to have spent a lot of time recently talking about buildings, and not just to Unitarians. What does it say about the spiritual life of your congregation if the first thing you mention is the state of the roof? And, indeed, how can you concentrate on your spiritual life with cold, sooty water dripping down your neck?

In one of my services I use Maslow's triangle as a model. The two bottom widest layers are physiological and safety needs. Every teacher knows that it is difficult if not impossible to teach a child who is cold/hungry/frightened. Once you are physically safe and comfortable then you can concentrate on the next two tiers up: love and belonging, then esteem,

before you reach the pinnacle of the triangle which is self actualisation. Churches are no different, if the needs of the building are consuming all your attention/money/will power then you have none/too little to spare for the true life of the church.

You know this; I am not trying to teach my grandmother. I am just saying, if you spent a bit longer talking about the fabric and planning for the future, might you then release a whole lot of energy to spend on the spiritual life of your community?

Because if you don't – if all fails and you disappear forever – will anyone miss you?

Dorothy Haughton is a worship leader in the Midlands.

HOW TO MAKE CHURCH BRILLIANT



Letters to the Editor

Inquirer is connected and engrossing

To the Editor:

This may not be considered usual but I would like to express my appreciation for the superb job which the current Editor does with the *Inquirer* magazine. I am sure that there must be a great deal of satisfaction associated with its production at such a frequent interval, though I imagine that this must come with its fair share of various niggles at times.

Since I have been a subscriber, some of the articles have almost moved me to tears (and I am not easily moved to tears!). One of the regular columnists nearly always gets me severely agitated, (no names, no pack-drill!). But this is all part of the healthy balance within what is a very informative, connected and engrossing magazine. It's also always nice to see the 'Editor's View' on page two, with either a highly topical or occasionally controversial comment.

I myself have been fortunate enough to have had one or two items published but I positively cringe when I recall some of my more ill-considered submissions, which of course never got houseroom! Thank goodness for the editor! Keep up the great work!

Graham Phoenix

A worship leader
Ansdell Unitarian Church
Lytham St Annes

Trusts take on a new secretary

To the Editor:

On behalf of the Hibbert, Gregson and Case Trusts, I would like to express our deep appreciation of the work done by Kay Millard as secretary of the Trusts for many years. Kay retired from this role recently and was presented with a card and a gift to show our appreciation at the annual dinner in June which she attended with her son, Rod, as special guests.

During Kay's time as secretary, the Trusts have started to move from being reactive to applications for grants, to being proactive in initiating projects in line with the Trusts' aims. The seminar 'Ministry in the Making', 'LifeSpirit' and 'Shaping the Future' are all

examples of this change.

The Trusts' new secretary is Rachel Skelton who can be contacted at **theseecretary@thehibberttrust.org.uk** and **theseecretary@thejohngregsontrust.org.uk**

We have innovative plans for furthering the Trusts' aims in the future using modern technology to our advantage. The aims of The Hibbert & Case Trusts include promoting public interest and personal scholarship in contemporary issues in liberal religion. The aim of the John Gregson Trust is funding the conservation of chapels of historical & architectural importance.

If any readers would like further information, please contact Rachel at the email addresses above.

Dot Hewerdine

Chair of the Hibbert, Gregson & Case Trusts

Lay leaders should accept payment

To the Editor:

I must take issue with Ralph Brown from Plymouth, who in a letter published in the 7 June *Inquirer* expressed amazement that any lay service leader (I refuse to call myself a 'preacher') should accept payment for conducting services on a Sunday.

I understand the thinking behind such a statement and actually felt much the same as Mr Brown when I started taking services some six years ago.

I was urged, however, by our wonderful ex-minister, now retired, that outside my own church, where I obviously operate on a voluntary basis, I should accept the going fee, as otherwise I would be doing those who really needed the money a grave disservice. If I then use that money for our own church's chosen charity, which I always do, then fine, I need have no guilty feelings.

I know that many service leaders who visit our church do exactly that. They use that money for good causes and I trust that our treasurer has no compunction in handing over the agreed fee at the end of the service. I realise many of our churches are strapped for cash, but for them to accept the services of many of these excellent 'preachers' at no cost whatsoever would be, I feel, a big mistake.

Finally, it might interest Mr Brown to know that I rarely go outside my own church, and so the two or three fees I pick up from other churches during the year are hardly likely to swell the coffers of our chosen charity to a tremendous extent. You see, I still have that guilty feeling when the money is handed over!

Graham Williams

Kidderminster New Meeting House

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to **inquirer@btinternet.com**. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

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Unitarian flame
lit
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Hale Chapel was founded in 1722/23 in the small hamlet of Halebarns, about two miles southeast of Altrincham town centre. During the 48-year-long ministry there of Rev Robert Harrop (1777-1815), he and several wealthy members of the Hale Chapel, instigated the new Unitarian congregation in Shaws Lane in Altrincham in 1814.

the first British Unitarian congregation to be formed following the passage of the parliamentary bill of William Smith MP in July 1813, which made the holding of Unitarian views legal, although this is not mentioned in the accounts of the opening.

The new congregation prospered, sharing its ministers with Hale Chapel until 1877. There was a thriving Sunday School, but by the late 1860's the chapel had become inadequate for the growing congregation. It was decided to move to larger premises. The first site and plan was beyond the congregation's financial capacity, but a more modest chapel was designed by the well-known Manchester architect Thomas Worthington, and opened in December 1872, while Rev Edward House was joint minister. In 1877, the Rev House became full time minister at Altrincham and Hale Chapel appointed its own minister.

The Altrincham congregation was led by a succession of charismatic ministers including Edward House, the Reverend Edwin Odgers (1883-1898) and Dendy Agate (1898-1916). New buildings were added to cater for the expanding Sunday schools and numerous weekday activities such as youth clubs, gymnastics and Ladies Societies. In 1875 a new small schoolroom with attached chapel house was completed and in 1885 the large schoolroom was built; the handsome Parsonage was completed in 1900. The congregation probably reached its zenith in its centenary year, 1914.

Initially, a social divide existed within the congregation. The income of the chapel was mainly from pew rents and subscriptions from the wealthy members who attended morning service. No pew rent was expected from the evening attenders, and as a matter of principle no collection was made at the evening service. Both the Rev Odgers and the Rev Agate made strenuous efforts to break down the differences between the social classes but we do not know if equality was ever reached in those pre-First World War years.



The Dunham Road congregation celebrates the opening of the Shaws Lane Chapel on Thursday 8 September 1814

The congregation has had an excellent relationship with all its ministers except for Rev Edgar Fripp (1917-21) whose High Anglican approach to worship was unacceptable to a dissenting protestant congregation, leading to a sharp decline in chapel attendance.

However, his successor, the much beloved Reverend Arthur Holland Biggs, (1922-1936) revived the congregation in the early '20s and sustained it through the depression years.

During the difficult war years, Reverends Lionel Phelps (1937-43) and Arthur Vallence (1943-60) maintained services when many of the congregants were at war and the large schoolroom had been requisitioned by the Auxiliary Fire Service. In 1946, under the strong leadership of Arthur Vallence, weekday activities such as the Scout troop, the Brownie pack, the Unitarian Young Peoples League and the Women's League flourished. Popular May

Queen celebrations drew large congregations while he also edited the *Unitarian* magazine, published by the Manchester District Association. During the time of Reverend Peter Godfrey, the joint ministry of Altrincham with Urmston commenced and continues to the present day. Peter Godfrey also edited the *Unitarian* and made strong ecumenical links with other congregations in the town; he also set up the 'Send a Child to Hucklow' Unitarian charity which flourishes still.

During the late '50s and through the '60s, the numbers attending all religious denominations declined sharply and Unitarianism suffered disproportionately from this; one of the immediate effects in 1967 was the decision to hold only one service per Sunday.

In 1972, under the ministry of the Rev John Midgley, the congregation celebrated the Chapel centenary, with the congregation raising sufficient money to redecorate the chapel and to hold a grand reunion dinner. When he resigned in 1988, his wife Celia Midgley was appointed to the Joint Ministry of Altrincham and Urmston, becoming the fourth outstanding post-war minister, all being prominent characters in British Unitarianism and all serving as General Assembly presidents. Jeffrey Teagle, Chief Executive of the General Assembly 1994-2007, attended the chapel in his youth and Martin West, a present member, was GA Treasurer in 2005-09.

This year the congregation marks 200 years of Unitarianism in Altrincham and we celebrate the opening of Shaws Lane Chapel with a 200th anniversary Service on Sunday 7th September at 3pm.

Ruston A (2014) What has 200 years of being legal brought Unitarianism? 'The Inquirer', Number 7841, 26 April 2014, pages 6-8. Teagle F and Midgley J. Eds (1997). *The Unitarian Congregation in Altrincham 1814 – 1997*.



Ipswich Unitarians gather on the Ipswich Town Hall steps.

Call for peace in Gaza

On Sunday, 20 July, simultaneous peace vigils were held by congregations across the country. I initiated the action in response to the strong opinions being expressed both outside and within our Unitarian community. Many wondered what could be done about the conflict in Gaza and, believing that actions speak louder than words, a vigil was suggested: to come together in a peaceful way to denounce the continuing violence and suffering of all people in the region. And, perhaps more importantly, to highlight and celebrate the work being done by groups who foster peaceful links between communities.

As stated clearly on our new-look website, "Unitarians oppose all oppression and discrimination and affirm the values of peace, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation." We have a tradition of standing up for others, as we believe in the underlying unity and connectedness of humanity.

Grassroots support was strong, but since time was tight and some congregations would be in the middle of their services at midday, only a few were able to hold a vigil or mark it some other way: Ipswich, Godalming, Chorlton, Gellionnen & Graig Unitarians and Upper Chapel, Sheffield were among the participants.

Collections were made on behalf of the charities 'Ukuleles for Peace' and 'Children of Peace', both non-partisan and working hard to bring people together in peace.

It wasn't a big event in terms of numbers, but it was big in the precedent it sets. It is possible for a person or group to highlight a cause and gain support for action. It has also, in conjunction with Simple Gifts' recent workshop, prompted serious discussion of how Unitarians in the UK might work on social action issues in the future. Thanks to all who took part.

— By Alison Mercer, member at Ipswich Unitarian Meeting

Contribute your
congregation's news
for this page. Email
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Park Lane commemorates WW1

"Refurbished chapel window dedicated to fallen soldiers unveiled" was the headline from the half page spread in our local paper the Wigan Observer. When I contacted the newspaper I was surprised that they were quite so interested in the history of our little chapel. They sent down a photographer and published a lovely article about our roll of honour window, which was looking somewhat shabby. The window has been refurbished and will be rededicated on the 3rd of August at 11am during a special commemoration ceremony which will honour the men of the chapel who fell during this war to end all wars.

All 10 men commemorated by the window were killed. In 1925 the congregation of Park Lane Unitarian Chapel built an extension to the school as a Memorial Room dedicated to the memory of those men connected with the chapel who had perished. As well as this utilitarian memorial, a marble tablet was erected in the room inscribed with all the names of the fallen. A beautiful stained glass window was commissioned for the chapel and, additionally there is a framed Roll of Honour, "The Scrap of Paper" naming all those who pledged to serve King and country. The inscription on the founding stone outside the 'Soldier's Room' reads:

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF THOSE WHO
SERVED IN THE GREAT WAT 1914-1918 THIS STONE
WAS LAID BY PETER GORTON, ESQ JULY 29TH 1925

Peter Gorton was manager at Bryn Hall Colliery. The choice of Peter Gorton was most apt as many of the men who died were colliers.

— By the Rev Lynne Readett, (pictured below) Merseyside district minister. Wigan Observer photo, used with permission.

